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“You can change your noses, but you can’t change your Moses”:

## Olfactory Aesthetics and the Jewish “Race”

Zoë Roth

AT APPROXIMATELY HALF PAST FIVE in the evening of November 18, 1922, Marcel Proust died of pneumonia. His friend Jean Cocteau was one of the first visitors to attend the scene. Upon Cocteau’s advice, Proust’s brother allowed the American artist Man Ray to take the writer’s portrait. Although Cocteau had known Man Ray only for a short time, he had been impressed by the photographer’s portrait of him. The invitation to photograph Proust came with a strict condition. Only three prints would be made: one for the family, one for Cocteau, and one for Man Ray.<sup>1</sup> The resulting silver gelatine print is one of the few images of Proust that remain (Figure 1). Man Ray was in the midst of developing his avant-garde “rayographs,” abstract images composed by placing objects on photosensitive paper. His Proust portrait, by contrast, draws on techniques of mourning portraiture that date back to the medium’s nineteenth-century origins. Taken in a very low light that would have required a large aperture, the image is shot with a shallow depth of field, which foregrounds Proust’s almost disembodied head in front of the room’s vertically-striped walls.<sup>2</sup> The stark contrast between the white folds of the bedclothes and the author’s sunken, dark eye sockets, bushy moustache, and dense shock of beard produces a chiaroscuro effect. Within the play of shadow and light, Proust’s overexposed, almost glowing nose – positioned exactly on the central vertical plane in the upper third of the image –

commands attention. The prominent nose seems to reveal another countenance of the writer, one virtually undetectable in earlier photographs that depict a dapper Parisian socialite.

[ place Figure 1 in above paragraph or on facing page ]

Figure 1. **The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles. [ words inserted ]** Man Ray, *Marcel Proust on his Deathbed*, 1922. Gelatin silver print,  $5 \frac{15}{16} \times 7 \frac{13}{16}$  in. © Man Ray Trust ARS-ADAGP.

The Jewish Cultural Studies critic Jonathan Freedman has suggested that to look at the “famous photograph of Proust’s corpse still in its deathbed is to witness this unmistakably Jewish visage as if it were etched onto the face of the foppish dandy familiar from earlier photographs: [...] the nose, prominent but not overpowering in earlier pictures, giving way to one powerfully, indeed tumescently, Jewish.”<sup>3</sup> Freedman’s evocation of sexuality through the adverb “tumescently” points to the connection between Jewishness and homosexuality as ‘hidden’ identities in *À la recherche du temps perdu*. In his wider exploration of the novel, Freedman argues that Proust destabilizes the racialized signification of the ‘Jew’ by constructing it in relation to the “ontological and epistemological uncertainty” of the figure of the homosexual (355). Yet in his interpretation of Proust’s image, he momentarily lapses into an essentialism that unreflexively invests Proust’s nose with a predetermined racial character that is suddenly revealed on his deathbed. This brief critical gesture reinforces the sort of *fin-de-siècle* discourses that once posited Jewishness as a hidden essence, or even a pathology, that can be read through surface signs, like the nose. But what prompts this uncharacteristic, if brief, essentialist reading of the ‘Jewish’ nose?

Proust's own novel offers a way of exploring how racialized interpretations construct the 'Jewish' nose as an innate symbol of Jewish difference. Man Ray's deathbed image eerily evokes a famous scene from *À la recherche*, which anticipates the death of the protagonist, Charles Swann. In the passage, Swann's illness initiates a process that gradually reveals a previously ambiguous 'Jewish' countenance embodied by the nose:

Swann entrât dans cette pièce qui était fort grande [...] tous les regards s'attachèrent à ce visage duquel la maladie avait si bien rongé les joues, comme une lune décroissante, que sauf sous un certain angle, celui sans doute sous lequel Swann se regardait, elles tournaient court comme un décor inconsistant auquel une illusion d'optique peut seule ajouter l'apparence de l'épaisseur. Soit à cause de l'absence de ces joues qui n'étaient plus là pour le diminuer, soit que l'artériosclérose, qui est une intoxication aussi, le rougît comme eût fait l'ivrognerie ou le déformât comme eut fait la morphine, le nez de polichinelle de Swann, longtemps résorbé dans un visage agréable, semblait maintenant énorme, tuméfié, cramoisi, plutôt celui d'un vieil Hébreu que d'un curieux Valois. D'ailleurs peut-être chez lui en ces derniers jours la race faisait-elle reparaître plus accusé le type physique qui la caractérise, en même temps que le sentiment d'une solidarité morale avec les autres Juifs, solidarité que Swann semblait avoir oubliée toute sa vie, et que greffées les unes sur les autres, la maladie mortelle, l'affaire Dreyfus, la propagande antisémite avaient réveillée.<sup>4</sup>

Swann enters the salon as if from off-stage, immediately connecting the space to a *pièce de theatre* that defamiliarizes him, revealing another "angle." Swann's cancer has emaciated his

cheeks, but the lexical field used to describe his nose makes it vivid and swollen; his red, atherosclerosis-inflamed nose is heightened through reference to “intoxication,” “drunkenness,” and “morphine.” The analogy between Swann’s physical deterioration and his moral degeneration finds its fullest expression in the “enormous, tumid, crimson” nose that can only belong to “an old Hebrew.” The pathos in Proust’s description cannot fully conceal how Swann’s malady reshapes him into *le sale Juif*, a figure that embodies “the Jewish stereotype, meaning ugliness, filth, and disease.”<sup>5</sup> Yet the passage also questions the visual reliability of the ‘Jewish’ nose: these racialized ways of seeing are at first uncertain, recalling the qualities of an “optical illusion.” They begin to take on a sense of “thickness” (*l’épaisseur*) only through the extended metaphor that connects the ‘Jewish’ nose to disease, degeneration, and pathology.

I want to take my cue from the connection between the Jewish nose, disease, and filth to think about another sensorial experience that escapes direct representation in the passage: the olfactory. Odor and smell are hinted at in the gustatory register of intoxication and drunkenness, the evocation of dirtiness – both physical and moral – and in the very presence of the organ of scents itself: the nose. Freedman’s interpretation of Proust’s image also conjures the amorphous influence of smell through adjectives like “overpowering,” while his connection of the ‘Jewish’ nose to an excessive sexual presence echoes the animal, base dimension of smell. Smell thus seems to shape the visual description of the ‘Jewish’ nose in both Proust and Freedman – even when these smells may be absent or imagined. The ephemerality of smell makes it particularly difficult to describe, leading to representation via metaphor, allusion, and ellipsis. Nevertheless, smell’s amorphous form actually heightens racial perception, because it invests the visibility of race with an ‘overpowering’ but ineffable affect. It is the powerful combination of odor, visibility, and disease that is often at work, I argue, when critics interpret a nose as Jewish.

In order to unpack smell's heuristic role in the visual recognition of race, I treat the Jewish nose in terms of its aesthetic and perceptual properties – the way that it smells rather than looks. This approach builds on the role of the olfactory in Proust, for whom it is smell and taste, “plus frêles mais plus vivaces, plus immatérielles, plus persistantes, plus fidèles,” and not vision that underpin “l'édifice immense du souvenir” of Proust's œuvre.<sup>6</sup> Smell unlocks the most Proustian of aesthetic figures, *la mémoire involontaire*, which results from dipping a madeleine into a cup of aromatic lime tea. Despite its profound aesthetic qualities, however, smell is very difficult to represent visually and linguistically. A photograph or painting cannot recreate the odors of the scene it indexes. Similarly, humans' highly developed sense of smell is not matched by an equally precise and expansive lexis for describing smell in English or in *Romance* languages like French.<sup>7</sup> Odors are classified by cause or effect rather than by their specific properties, and they generally fall into the broad categories of good or bad. This does not make odors less powerful, however. While they may seem intangible – since often not visible – odors are made up of microscopic particles that literally enter our bodies when we smell them, uniting the one who smells with the odor's potential source. The way in which smell troubles phenomenological boundaries often provokes anxieties about contamination, both hygienic and existential. Odor symbolizes “what imperils the clearly delineated distinctions” between “races, genders, classes, species, and the public and the private.”<sup>8</sup> Smell's penetration of bodies at the most intimate level, combined with its ineffability, coalesces in the notion that odors signify the essential elements of someone's identity – their inner truth (Classen, Howes, Synnott 4). As Jean-Pierre Albert argues, odor appears “à la fois le meilleur indice de l'identité de l'autre et l'ineffaçable support de sa révélation.”<sup>9</sup>

The difficulty of describing smell is reproduced on a methodological and disciplinary level through smell's muteness in the analysis of race. But as I will show throughout this article, smell's ineffability, its ability to trouble bodily and social boundaries, and its intuitive mode all shape the visual interpretation of race. While the difficulty of describing smells means they do not take the same discursive prominence in the recognition of race as vision, the metaphors and figures that evoke odor, such as the 'dirty Jew' or the 'Jewish nose,' are highly potent. This ineffability also lends the visual recognition of race a sense of intuition, as if a preexisting race state has been revealed, something evident in Freedman's interpretation of Proust's image. In turn, this sense of revealing an inner truth imbues the identity with a feeling of racial essentialism.

To bring the nose's sensory function to bear on its visual representation – and our modes of interpretation – I develop the concept of 'olfactory aesthetics.' The concept of olfactory aesthetics describes how an image can convey the experience of smell through forms that do not in and of themselves have an odor.<sup>10</sup> As Proust's notion of *mémoire involontaire* reminds us, odors need not be smelled to be perceived. The memory of a deeply unpleasant smell can send a shiver down one's spine, while the whisper of remembered odors can open memory's floodgates. In the language of affect studies, odors act as material intensities that can move between bodies and objects, including visual images, often at a precognitive level.<sup>11</sup> Olfactory aesthetics accounts for the way images move us on affective levels, while also elucidating the non-verbal and non-visual elements of racial perception that escape direct expression.

I thus also employ the concept of olfactory aesthetics to think specifically about the process of interpretation. In French, *sentir* means both to smell and to feel, and this helps explain how odors appeal to 'gut feelings,' triggering affective, aesthetic, and emotional reactions.

Attending to olfactory perception, the article argues, will reveal the affective dimension of interpretation – the rules that govern the *feeling* of criticism. The olfactory will help us retrace how critics interpret indistinct sense perceptions into words – perceptions that subsequently gain an intellectual authority by acquiring a critical vocabulary. Can the allusion to odor in an image, which is not immediately evident in its thematic or semiotic content, [ **punctuation modified** ] provoke an affective response we may not even be aware is taking place? Could the suggestion of smell in a work's aesthetics lead us to recognize, locate, and stabilize race in an image's visuality – to invest the 'Jewish' nose with a visible racial presence? More broadly, this article argues that developing a critical approach that is conscious of smell's effect on the visual has the potential to change our interpretation of the predetermined signs that symbolically mark particular bodies as racially different.

By approaching the Jewish nose as an organ of 'scents,' I go against the grain of genealogies of the Jewish nose, which largely focus on its visual representation and appearance. Beginning in the eighth century, art and other visual forms began to differentiate Jews according to costume, such as hats, leading to an eventual stigmatization that was religious in origin. Jews' visual difference from Christians was a sign of their eternal moral difference as betrayers of Christ.<sup>12</sup> The Middle Ages eventually witnessed a shift from designating Jews according to clothing to identifying them by physiognomic differences, like the stereotypical 'Gothic' hooked nose, which came to be a sign of Jews' eternal difference.<sup>13</sup> But it is not until the advent of the racial sciences in the nineteenth century that the 'Jewish' nose went from being a sign of religious perfidy and social distinction to one of biological difference (Sagaert 974).<sup>14</sup> The nose thus comes to symbolize "an untrustworthy, immoral, and suspicious character" (Mosse 64). Psychological discourses associated the 'Jewish' nose with circumcision, with both of them



signaling sexual perversion and pathology.<sup>15</sup> The emergence of the nose job in fin-de-siècle Berlin introduced a sense of mutability to the ‘Jewish’ nose (Gilman, *Jew’s Body* 384), but this was not enough to shift the sense that it revealed a crucial aspect of Jewish identity: Across the Atlantic during the 1940s, the American rabbi Emil G. Hirsch told debutantes who desired nose jobs that “You can change your noses, but you can’t change your Moses.”<sup>16</sup>

While the nose has been the most prominent marker of Jewish difference, odors have also played an important role in constructing Jews as degenerate, unhygienic, and in need of containment. Descriptions of *foetor Judaicus*, or ‘Jewish stench,’ can be traced to late antiquity and the medieval period, in which theological discourses contrasted Christ’s perfumed corpse with Judas’ supposedly stinking body (Sagaert 981). In a manner similar to the way the ‘Jewish’ nose becomes a racial characteristic, *foetor Judaicus* migrates from its religious origins in Christian anti-Judaism to take on a biological basis with the emergence of racial thinking in the nineteenth century (Sagaert 981). Anxieties around ‘Jewish’ odors intensified during this period because Jews had begun to assimilate and enter mainstream spaces, professions, and institutions, becoming visually less discernable from other groups.<sup>17</sup> Odors helped identify racial differences in the absence of reliable visual signs.<sup>18</sup> Schopenhauer considered *foetor Judaicus* to be a physiological index of Jews’ supposed immorality,<sup>19</sup> while Édouard Drumont insisted that “la puanteur juive” was as potent a marker of the ‘Jewish’ race as the hooked nose.<sup>20</sup> For the racist anthropologist Georges Montandon, odors revealed Jews’ racial pathology.<sup>21</sup> Just as the ‘Jewish’ nose operated as an index of sexual perversion, *foetor Judaicus* associated Jews with femininity through sexological discourses that posited that women emitted stronger odors than men in order to attract reproductive mates. As Jay Geller argues, to “speak of a Jewish odor was to evoke the primitive, the sexual, the feminine.”<sup>22</sup>

In this article, I will bring together the ‘Jewish’ nose’s visual and olfactory elements in order to critique the perceptual conditions under which we see. In doing so, I move away from models of reading, watching or even touching images.<sup>23</sup> I suggest instead that we *smell* them. “To sniff something out” is a metaphor for detecting meaning through instinct or intuition. This process thus entails becoming attuned to the multiple perceptual processes involved in interpreting images. In this sense, I build on recent work that has underlined the physical materials, conditions, and technologies of visual forms.<sup>24</sup> I take a different direction, however, foregrounding smell’s phenomenological dimensions in order to explore the forms of aesthetic experience implicated in the way we interpret images. I develop a situated critical method by imagining olfactory encounters with images, and for this reason I will continue to focus on the work of Man Ray, as well as his artistic collaborator, Marcel Duchamp. Both artists played with the rejection of Jewish identity: Man Ray explicitly hid his Lower East Side Jewish roots, while Duchamp discarded a Jewish alter-ego in favor of the gender-bending Rrose Sélavy. The critical reception of these artists’ legacy has often sought to trace the biographical and historical conditions underpinning this identity-play and the visual representation of Jewish difference. But Duchamp’s and Man Ray’s use of experimental aesthetic techniques and ‘readymades,’ commercially manufactured objects repurposed for absurdist ends, undermined what Duchamp called “retinal art,” or art that only exercised the visual senses.<sup>25</sup> This conceptual approach suggests a way of engaging with objects on an olfactory level even if we are not actually able to smell them.

### **Remembrance of things passed**

What does it mean to see a smell? Few works of art are constructed from odors, meaning most aesthetic objects will refract olfactory experience through the visual or the verbal. It is smell's ability to escape representation that helps reify race in the visual field. To understand smell's affective force, then, may help us imagine other ways of perceiving the 'Jewish' nose – in the manner of an odor that suddenly opens up new perceptual channels and conjures unbidden mental images. In order to demonstrate the way smell shapes the visual field, I will actively 'smell' Proust's portrait to imagine what different relations might emerge if we specifically engage with the interaction of the visual and the olfactory. This approach draws on the recent work of Tina Campt, who develops a method of "listening" to photographs in order to recover racialized experience elided or silenced by the historical archive.<sup>26</sup> My approach focuses on phenomenological experience, drawing on the way smell moves between and connects subjects, disturbing bodily boundaries. Instead of maintaining a critical distance from the image, I endorse being 'overpowered' by odors. Attending to how the image's affective dimension activates a non-visual dimension of perception opens up new ways of understanding how racialized interpretations of the 'Jewish' nose emerge.

In Proust, smell enables access not only to other times but also to other spaces, spaces replete with lived experiences that remain locked away until smell conjures them in the imagination.<sup>27</sup> Thus I want to enter Proust's world by imagining the smells that would have permeated his room in his final days. I breathe in deeply. The odors I encounter are not of lime tea and madeleines, however. In a desperate attempt to keep out the sound from the street, Proust had lined his bedroom in cork. The heavily insulated space, scattered with potions and treatments, smells strongly from the fumigations he undertook to treat his lifelong asthma and the "rhino-goménol" ointment he used as a decongestant.<sup>28</sup> These pungent aromas only partially

mask the odor of Proust's pneumonia, which produces foul-smelling sputum. A steady procession of visitors, and then mourners, passes through his room, bringing with them their own odors of sweat, perfume, and wool overcoats damp from a typical Parisian November.<sup>29</sup> After his death, a visitor lays a bunch of Parma violets on his chest, which give off a delicate scent.<sup>30</sup> These odors linger in the closed-up room, whose shutters have been closed to slow the body's rate of decomposition.

I crinkle my nose at this detail, but the imagined smell of corpses attunes me to redolent connections between the image's visibility and other olfactory experiences. One of these experiences is that of the photographer, Man Ray, who takes the image two days after Proust's death, around the time a body begins to decompose. Does the odiferous atmosphere of Proust's 'darkroom' affect Man Ray, leading him to foreground Proust's nose? Just before taking the image, Man Ray had also complained of respiratory problems. A "nasty cold," as he called it, nearly prevented him from photographing the writer. In fact, Man Ray was suffering from a severe case of depression that had kept him virtually bedbound, with the cold acting as a metaphor for the blocked 'inspiration' brought on by depression.<sup>31</sup> Yet the act of photographing Proust could also have affected Man Ray on a physical level.

In his autobiography, *Self-Portrait*, Man Ray describes how he came to photograph Proust. He prefaces the anecdote with a more general comment about how photographing "a person on his deathbed" was "repugnant but presented no problems, because there was no danger not only of the subject moving, but of his being consulted on the results" (176-77).

Photographing a corpse poses no technical problems for Man Ray, but it nevertheless provokes a deeply embodied response that also hints at smell's effects. Repugnance and repulsion, often uncontrollable reflexes and affects, are commonly associated with odor. Odor and disease seem

to pass between Proust and Man Ray, disturbing their bodily boundaries and reminding me that, like Proust, Man Ray was a Jewish artist who dissimulated his origins. Indeed, contemporary medical discourses associated “le type racial juif” with nervous diseases (Montandon 17), which included both asthma and depression – the maladies afflicting Proust and Man Ray, respectively. Just like Swann’s cancer, these ‘Jewish’ pathologies suggest an indelible inner character, condensing them both into the trope of the diseased Jew.

The metaphorical odor that hangs over the image thus tempts me to read an essential racial identity into the image, to point metonymically to smell through the most prominent symbol of smell: the nose. As Jean-Pierre Albert argues, “une odeur corporelle échappe pour l’essentiel à la volonté des personnes en présence. Elle est donc, par excellence, ce qui ‘trahit’ la véritable identité” (86). But this understanding of smell would merely reinforce the reflexive gesture I critiqued at the beginning of this article. Rather, I turn to focus on how the odor affects *me*. The faint scent of a decomposing body, the lingering smell of fumigations, the musty atmosphere of the closed-up room – when I imagine the volatile particles of these smells entering my body, I begin to feel sick.<sup>32</sup> But these feelings of repulsion and sickness are hard to put into words. They are related not only to the content of the smells, or whether they are good or bad, but in the imagined sensation that my bodily boundaries have been disturbed, a key component in racialized responses to smell and odor. My reaction to ‘smelling’ the image reminds me of the intimate relationship between aesthetic perception and critical interpretation. By focusing on my own phenomenological response, I am forced to interrogate the structures of perception that tempt me to read race into the image.

By ‘smelling’ Proust’s image, I have sought to trace the olfactory aesthetics that heighten the perception of race, but also to demonstrate how a self-reflexive attention to smell and odor

may enable us to loosen slightly race's grip on the imagination. Smell's elusiveness and ephemerality make it difficult to describe directly, thus requiring the use of metaphors, such as the diseased Jew or the 'Jewish' nose. But by sniffing out this amorphous context I have become more aware of the way it shapes critical interpretation. This exercise has remained highly speculative but has pointed to the way smell may 'overwhelm' our interpretation of an image without us necessarily being aware of it.

### **De bon' aire**

In my analysis of images of the 'Jewish' nose thus far, I have argued that the imagination of smell heightens the perception of racial difference by triggering racialized fears, anxieties, and affects. In the absence of an expansive and precise lexicon for describing smell's effect, critics may unconsciously translate smell's elusiveness into a clearly identifiable visual sign. Up until this point, this suggestion of smell has been communicated through the merest whiff of presence left by a passing metaphor or an optical effect. In the final section, however, I want to engage with Marcel Duchamp, an artist who worked with smell on both a literal and a figurative level in order to understand how smell's concrete and intangible registers interact induce racialized interpretations.

Duchamp is the precursor to contemporary olfactory art. In the 1938 International Surrealist exhibition in Paris he roasted coffee beans, burned ropes, and diffused cedar perfumes in the space.<sup>33</sup> Duchamp filled an empty serum ampoule with "50cc of Paris Air" to create *Air de Paris*, a 'readymade' that was slightly altered to transform it into found art. Perhaps his most direct engagement with the olfactory is *La Belle Haleine*, a collaboration with Man Ray, in which they repurposed an empty bottle of *Un Air Embaumé*, the most popular fragrance of the

Rigaud Company of Paris, in order to launch the signature perfume of Duchamp's alter ego, Rose Sélavy.<sup>34</sup>

Rose was 'born' in New York in 1920 but emigrated to Paris in 1921 when Duchamp and Man Ray returned to Paris. She debuted in a series of photographs taken by Man Ray, one of which later graced the bottle of *La Belle Haleine* [**Figure 2**]. But Rose's relation to the olfactory predates her work as a perfume model. Rose is of course a flower. Like the relation between the gustatory and the olfactory in Proust, her full name also plays on "arroser c'est la vie," a metaphor for intoxication (alcohol is also often used in perfumes), while *La Belle Haleine* can be taken as a pun for Helen of Troy ('la belle Hélène') that provides an ironic comment on Rose's *jolie laide* persona. It is also easier to imagine Rose suffering from halitosis rather than emitting 'beautiful breath.' Eau de cologne was sometimes used as a mouthwash in the early twentieth century (Verbeek 134), since it contained alcohol and was thus an antiseptic.

Just as implied odors are at the origins of Rose's identity, so too is an elision of race. In an interview many years later, Duchamp revealed that the now-iconic "Rose" was not his first choice:

J'ai voulu changer d'identité et la première idée qui m'est venue c'est de prendre un nom juif. J'étais catholique et c'était déjà un changement que de passer d'une religion à une autre! Je n'ai pas trouvé de nom juif qui me plaise ou qui me tente et tout d'un coup j'ai eu une idée: pourquoi ne pas changer de sexe! Alors de là est venu le nom de Rose Sélavy.<sup>35</sup>

While Duchamp appears to cast aside Jewishness in favor of changing gender, he ascribes a different origin to Rose in another interview: “Rose Sélavy, born in NY. Jewish name. Change of sex – Rose being the most ugly name for my personal taste and Sélavy the easy play on the words: that’s life.”<sup>36</sup> Rose was a popular Jewish name at the time, while Sélavy could also be read as incorporating the common French Jewish surname, Lévy.<sup>37</sup> More than these historical footnotes, however, I am interested in the way Rose points to race through the absence of smell. Indeed, the elision of race is at the very origins of Rose’s identity, just as her name can only metaphorically evoke the odor of flowers. The odor of ‘Rose’s’ elides race as a clear, identifiable category of identity.

This elision, however, does not deodorize race but rather heightens it by turning it into an aesthetic effect that permeates Rose’s ambivalent gender and sexuality, in particular through her relation to perfume. Perfume, body odors, and smell’s intuitive mode are closely related to sexual arousal and identity. The name of the actual perfume Duchamp and Man Ray used, which was marketed and sold to women, constructs a metaphorical connection between gender and Jewishness. ‘Un air embaumé’ translates into ‘perfumed air’ but also hints at embalment. The evocation of death and corpses is visually echoed in the coffin-like shape of the box in which *La Belle Haleine* rested.<sup>38</sup> These semiotic signs thus translate into vision and language an ineffable olfactory context that once again links Jews to perversion, disease, and degeneration. The perfume seems to distill the ‘essence’ of Jewish stereotypes, from the Jewish pervert to the *sale Juif* and the diseased Jew.

[ Place Figure 2 here ]



Figure 2. **The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles. [ words inserted ]** Man Ray, *Belle Haleine*, 1921. Gelatin silver print, 8 <sup>13</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 7 in. © Man Ray Trust ARS-ADAGP.

Rose's ambiguous race and gender are further evident in this image from the first series of photographs taken in collaboration with Man Ray [**Figure 3**]. Rose's silly feathered hat and ruff, affected coy expression, and harsh spotlight stage a highly contrived performance of femininity, but the clothing and hairstyle are frumpy and unflattering.<sup>39</sup> The heavy side lighting intensifies Rose's incongruous profile. It accentuates Duchamp's coarse masculine bearing, causing his aquiline nose to cast an actual shadow across the feminine register and recalling the antisemitic trope of the effeminate Jewish man. Duchamp's nose sticks out as the incongruous feature on Rose's visage, betraying her true masculine nature; the nose is "matter out of place," to use Mary Douglas's famous definition of dirt.<sup>40</sup> For Douglas, the regulation of dirt is a way of maintaining social and symbolic boundaries. Rose's nose acts as a boundary between race and gender, but the ineffable olfactory dimension also points to the porousness of these identities.

[ Place Figure 3 in paragraph above ]

Figure 3. Man Ray, *Duchamp as Rose Sélavy* [ **part of title deleted and spelling corrected** ], ca. 1921. Gelatin silver print. **Philadelphia Museum of Art. [ deleted ]** © 2013 Man Ray Trust ARS-ADAGP.

It is hard to ignore the way Duchamp's incarnation of Rose plays with Man Ray's Jewish background. Several art historians have connected Rose Sélavy to Jewishness through Duchamp's engagement with Jewish artists. Bradley Bailey argues that Duchamp takes 'Rose'

from the title of a song by the popular Jewish singer Fanny Brice, entitled “Rose of Washington Square” (41). Deborah Johnson has explored *Rose* as a homoerotic collaboration between Duchamp and Man Ray. Indeed, Duchamp’s adoption of a Jewish identity provides a counterpart to Man Ray’s early rejection of his. *Rose*, as Johnson argues “speaks to his [Man Ray’s] desire to be a closeted Jew, R(r)ose would give him the opportunity to be both in and out: a projection of himself that was openly Jewish, even as he, Ray, recoiled from his ethnic roots” (Johnson 89). These ‘inverted’ identities have proven very tempting for critics who have sought to demonstrate the hidden Jewish dimension of Man Ray’s work. Much like the ‘Jewish’ nose provides the outer sign of an essential inner state, Milly Heyd has read the symbols of Man Ray’s work, including sewing machines and irons, as outward evidence of an inner Jewish identity.<sup>41</sup>

These critical impulses do not necessarily zoom in on either the ‘Jewish’ nose or hint at an olfactory register. Whereas so far I have demonstrated how the difficulty of expressing the olfactory leads to the emergence of racialized metaphors about Jewish visibility, in critical attempts to recover Man Ray’s Jewish identity a reverse logic is at work. These approaches recover Man Ray’s Jewishness through an olfactory logic, which seeks to uncover his deepest concealed identity by reading the outward signs of his art. In the absence of clear visual signs of Jewish difference, scholars have had recourse to interpretative methods that evoke the olfactory effect of revealing a true identity, compelling the critic to *feel* race into Man Ray’s work. At the same time, tracing *Rose*’s olfactory aesthetics has brought the operations of this logic into focus. To engage smell in the interpretation of images entails becoming attuned to how they can affect us beyond their visual dimension, and, conversely, how racialized interpretations are not confined to the visual field but are reliant on the interplay of non-visual sensory experience.

### **S/he who smelt it, dealt it**

Near the beginning of this article, I asked: what does it mean to smell an image? To bring the olfactory into contact with visual interpretation reveals the multiple sensory experiences involved in the visual production and recognition of race. Smell's resistance to representation means it has been largely overlooked in scholarship on race and racism, which overwhelmingly approaches race as a visual and discursive phenomenon. Yet by employing a deliberately active mode of 'smelling' images, I have demonstrated that we, as critics and viewers, are implicated in the construction of race as a visual phenomenon. Because smells and odors waft between people, we cannot simply cordon off the (after)effects of critical interpretation; it is a fully embodied act. The suggestion of smell may unconsciously move the critic to assign racial meaning to an image. An olfactory aesthetics will enable criticism to develop a more sophisticated sensorial palate in order to understand how we might be active participants in producing racialized ways of seeing. And this mode of attunement can open up the imagination – in the same way that dipping a madeleine into a cup of lime-leaf tea opens a whole world of aesthetic pleasures – to other ways of sensing and consuming difference.

### ***Durham University***

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### *Notes*

<sup>1</sup> Man Ray, *Self Portrait* (London: André Deutsch, 1963), 176-77.

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<sup>2</sup> Man Ray reported that “the only available light came from a single electric light bulb of low wattage directly above Proust’s bed.” When asked if this made it difficult to take a picture, Man Ray retorted, “Certainly not! [...] A corpse is the easiest thing in the world to photograph. The subject being motionless. I was able to set my camera for as long an exposure as I pleased.” In Brendan Gill, *A New York Life: Of Friends and Others* (New York: Poseidon Press, 1990), 310-11.

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Freedman, “Coming out of the Jewish Closet with Marcel Proust,” *Queer Theory and the Jewish Question*, Daniel Boyarin, Daniel Itzkovitz, and Ann Pellegrini, eds. (New York: Columbia U P, 2003), 342. Freedman is far from the only critic to draw parallels between Proust’s racial identity and that of his characters. Recanati also suggests that the author passes this nose on to the most markedly Jewish character in *À la recherche*, Bloch, who attempts to minimize his “nez juif” through a series of clumsy physical legerdemains that only succeed in making it “semble presque droite [comme] une bossue bien arrangée.” This last quotation is from Marcel Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu, 4: Le temps retrouvé* (Paris: Gallimard, 1927), 84. Proust’s friends also alluded to his Jewish profile during his lifetime, but their comments are notable for their ambiguity, noting his “beau visage oriental” and his “nez droit, légèrement bossué par un ressaut qui le faisait se désespérer avec coquetterie.” Jean Recanati, *Profils juifs de Marcel Proust* (Paris: Éditions Buchet/Chastel, 1979), 15-16. See also Maurice Samuels *Inventing the Israelite: Jewish Fiction in the Nineteenth Century* (Stanford: Stanford U P, 2010), 256.

<sup>4</sup> Marcel Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu, 4: Sodome et Gomorrhe* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), 86.

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<sup>5</sup> George L. Mosse, *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (Oxford: Oxford U P, 1996), 65.

<sup>6</sup> Marcel Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu, 1: Du côté [ de ] ~~du~~ chez Swann* (Paris: Gallimard, 1919), 68.

<sup>7</sup> Constance Classen, David Howes, and Anthony Synnott, *Aroma: The Cultural History of Smell* (London; New York: Routledge, 1994), 3.

<sup>8</sup> Jay Geller, *The Other Jewish Question: Identifying the Jew and Making Sense of Modernity* (New York: Fordham U P, 2011), 274

<sup>9</sup> Jean-Pierre Albert, “L’odeur des autres: À propos de quelques stéréotypes,” in Gilles Boëtsch et al., eds., *Corps normalisé, corps stigmatisé, corps racialisé* (Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgique: De Boeck Supérieur, 2007), 83.

<sup>10</sup> There is a strand of contemporary ‘olfactory art’ characterized by the work of Guy Bleus and Anicka Yi. However, it is a distinctly minority tradition within art history.

<sup>11</sup> Lisa Blackman, *Immaterial Bodies* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2012), 72.

<sup>12</sup> Claudine Sagaert, “L’utilisation des préjugés esthétiques comme redoutable outil de stigmatisation du juif: La question de l’apparence dans les écrits antisémites du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle à la première moitié du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle,” *Revue d’anthropologie des connaissances*, 7:4 (2013/4): 974-75.

<sup>13</sup> Sara Lipton, *Dark Mirror: The Medieval Origins of Anti-Jewish Iconography* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2014), 317.

<sup>14</sup> For examples of this type of racial thinking, see Arthur de Gobineau, Adrian Collins, trans., *The Inequality of the Human Races* (London: William Heinemann, 1915), 122-23, and Johann [ **Friedrich** ] ~~Friedrich~~ Blumenbach, *On the Natural Varieties of Mankind* (1775, 1795) (New York: Bergman, 1969), 234.

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<sup>15</sup> Sander L. Gilman, *The Jew's Body* (New York: Routledge, 1991) 387-88.

<sup>16</sup> Qtd. in Sander L. Gilman, *Jewish Frontiers: Essays on Bodies, Histories, and Identities* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 111.

<sup>17</sup> Pierluigi Lanfranchi, "Foetor judaicus: Archéologie d'un préjugé," *Pallas*, 104 (2017): 119-33; Jay Geller, "The Aromatics of Jewish Difference; or, Benjamin's Allegory of Aura," *Jews and Other Differences: The New Jewish Cultural Studies*, Daniel Boyarin and Jonathan Boyarin, eds. (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1997), 222; Alain Corbin, *The Foul and the Fragrant: Odor and the French Social Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard U P, 1988), 54, 145.

<sup>18</sup> For a discussion of this phenomenon in the context of the Reconstruction and Jim Crow eras in the United States, see Mark M. Smith, *How Race Is Made: Slavery, Segregation, and the [Senses] Sense* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2006), 4.

<sup>19</sup> Pierre-Andre Taguieff, *La judéophobie: Des Lumières au jihad mondial* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2008), 213.

<sup>20</sup> Édouard Drumont, *La France juive* (Paris: C. Marpon & E. Flammarion, 1886), 34, 105.

<sup>21</sup> George Montandon, *Comment reconnaître le Juif?* (Paris: Nouvelles Éditions Françaises, 1940), 16-17.

<sup>22</sup> Jay Geller, *On Freud's Jewish Body: Mitigating Circumcisions* (New York: Fordham U P, 2007), 74.

<sup>23</sup> Ariella Azoulay uses the more active concept of "watching" to describe an ethically engaged critical positioning vis-à-vis the multiple relations that structure the "event" of photography in *The Civil Contract of Photography* (New York: Zone Books, 2008), 14. Margaret Olin puts forward a "haptic" approach to analyzing photographs in *Touching Photographs* (Chicago: Chicago U P, 2012).

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<sup>24</sup> Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart, eds., *Photographs, Objects, Histories: On the Materiality of Images* (London: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>25</sup> Calvin Tomkins, *Duchamp: A Biography* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, [ 1996 ]), 55, 156.

<sup>26</sup> Tina Campt, *Listening to Images* (Durham: Duke U P, 2017).

<sup>27</sup> Diana Fuss, *The Sense of an Interior: Four Rooms and the Writers That Shaped Them* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 66.

<sup>28</sup> François-Bernard Michel, *Proust et les écrivains devant la mort* (Paris: Grasset, 1995), 91.

<sup>29</sup> George D. Painter, *Marcel Proust: A Biography*, vol. 2 (New York: Random House, 1978), 362.

<sup>30</sup> William C. Carter, *Marcel Proust: A Life* (New Haven: Yale U P, 2000), 808

<sup>31</sup> Neil Baldwin, *Man Ray: American Artist* (New York: De Capo, 2001), 108.

<sup>32</sup> I am indebted to Cassia Roth's notion that the historian's experience of discomfort when reading archival records of pain and violence is a way of ethically engaging with the embodiment of subjects, such as enslaved women, whose experiences are difficult to recover from the archive. See Cassia Roth, "Specters of the Womb," talk given at the University of Liverpool, March 8, 2019. Zeb Tortirici's exploration of the "visceral" reaction historians often experience when encountering violent or explicit documents of the past has also been helpful. See [ **Zeb Tortirici** ], *Sins Against Nature: Sex and Archives in Colonial New Spain* (Durham: Duke U P, 2018).

<sup>33</sup> See Caro Verbeek, "Surreal Aroma's: (Re)constructing the Volatile Heritage of Marcel Duchamp," *Relief*, 10:1 (2016): 133.

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<sup>34</sup> *La Belle Haleine* eventually sold for 8.9 million euros in 2009 as part of Christie's auction of Yves Saint Laurent's estate.

<sup>35</sup> Pierre Cabanne, *Entretiens avec Marcel Duchamp* (Paris: Pierre Belfond, 1967), 118.

<sup>36</sup> Qtd. in Paul Matisse, *Marcel Duchamp, Notes*, Paul Matisse, trans. (Boston: G. K. Hall), n.286.

<sup>37</sup> Bradley Bailey, "Rose of Washington Square: Marcel Duchamp, Fanny Brice, and the Jewish Origins of Rose Sélavy," *Source: Notes in the History of Art*, 27:1 (Fall 2007): 41.

<sup>38</sup> Francis M. Naumann, "Belle Haleine: Eau de Voilette [Beautiful Breath: Veil Water], 1921," *Toutfait*, January 10, 2009, <https://z.umn.edu/489j>.

~~<http://www.toutfait.com/belle-haleine-eau-de-voilette-beautiful-breath-veil-water-1921/>.~~

<sup>39</sup> Deborah Johnson, "R(r)ose Sélavy as Man Ray: Reconsidering the Alter Ego of Marcel Duchamp," *Art Journal*, 72:1 (March 2013): ~~Johnson~~ 92.

<sup>40</sup> Douglas in fact takes this phrase from William James. See Mary Douglas, *Danger and Purity: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (New York: Routledge, 1966, 2001), 165.

<sup>41</sup> Milly Heyd, "Man Ray/Emmanuel Radnitsky: Who Is Behind the Enigma of Isidore Ducasse," *Complex Identities: Jewish Consciousness and Modern Art*, Matthew Baigell and Milly Heyd, eds. (New Brunswick: Rutgers U P, 2001).